



NEBRASKA

Right to Life

State affiliate to  
National Right to Life

June 2023



Gov. Jim Pillen holds a sleeping Gemma Marie as he signs the Preborn Child Protection Act on May 22. (Photo courtesy of Channel 8 News, ABC affiliate)

# Heartbeat Act fails to advance; 12-week Gestation Ban passes

On April 27, 2023, the Nebraska Legislature fell one vote short of advancing LB626, the Nebraska Heartbeat Act, authored by Sen. Joni Albrecht. LB626 would have banned abortions once a heartbeat could be detected, usually about six weeks into a pregnancy. It contained exceptions for rape, incest and to protect the life of the mother.

The bill advanced out of committee and through the first round of debate. However, opponents utilized a filibuster, and Sen. Merv Riepe, a self-professed pro-lifer and co-sponsor of the bill, chose the “present, not voting” route, which, as he knew it would, effectively killed the bill. [See accompanying article, page 2.]

What followed over the next several days was much debate among government officials and the pro-life community on possible options — none of which were ideal. The law would not allow the bill to be reintroduced, even with modifications, during this legislative session. Should we wait until next year? Should we try to attach an amendment to an existing proposed bill, and if so, should we compromise on the gestational age to save at least some babies in the womb? These were hard questions, and there were no easy answers.

At Gov. Jim Pillen’s prompting, Amendment 1658, the Preborn Child Protection Act that bans abortions after 12 weeks gestation, was introduced by Sen. Ben Hansen for attachment to LB574, the Let Them Grow Act sponsored by Sen. Kathleen Kauth. A bill that would ban “gender-affirming” surgeries for minors seemed to be the vehicle that could advance safeguards for babies after the first trimester of pregnancy.

On May 19, LB574 passed with just enough votes (33 in favor, 15 opposed). Gov. Pillen signed the measure on May 22, and it became effective immediately.

Our hope was to pass protection for beating hearts in the womb with the Nebraska Heartbeat Act. While LB574 allows unlimited abortions for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, it is still more limiting than the law that has been in place since 2010, the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act. That



Nebraska Right to Life Executive Director Sandy Danek (behind governor) and Board Member Barb McPhillips (to governor’s right) joins Nebraska Catholic Conference, Nebraska Family Alliance and Gov. Jim Pillen to celebrate the passage of a 12-week protection for Nebraska preborn babies.

law, which Nebraska Right to Life helped to pass, banned abortion after 20 weeks gestation.

Based on the Nebraska 2021 Statistical Report of Abortions, 2,360 abortions were performed; 2,195 of which took place before 12 weeks gestation. Unfortunately, since approximately 90% of abortions occur before 12 weeks, that’s still so many lives being lost; however, we will continue to work, as we have for more than 50 years, to protect all Nebraska preborn babies.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), representing Planned Parenthood of the Heartland and abortionist Dr. Sarah Traxter, filed a lawsuit in a state trial court in Lancaster County on May 30. The lawsuit claims the newly established law banning abortion at 12 weeks violates the “no bill shall contain more than one subject” rule in the Nebraska State Constitution.

State Sen. Kauth of Omaha, the sponsor of LB574, stated the title of her bill, “Let Them Grow,” describes how the two measures fit together. She explained the focus of her bill, even after the addition of Amendment 1658, is to help children grow and thrive, which both components seek to accomplish.

# First-ever Nebraska Walk for Life 2023 Gala

The celebration of life occurred Jan. 27, the night before the annual Walk for Life.



More than 500 people attend the Nebraska Walk for Life Gala.

## NRL rescinds endorsement of Senator Merv Riepe

When Sen. Merv Riepe was running for office in 2022, he sought and received Nebraska Right to Life's endorsement. Not only did he check the box on the NRL candidate survey for abortion being legal "in no case," he included handwritten comments on the survey stating: "Sen. Joni Albrecht and Sen. Suzanne Geist have agreed to serve as a reference to my character and integrity regarding right to life."

Yet Sen. Albrecht, the author of LB626, the Heartbeat Act, was unaware of Riepe using her name in this way, and was equally stunned at the "present-not-voting" action that effectively killed the bill this legislative session.

We were caught off guard by Sen. Riepe's non-vote, given that he chose to co-sponsor LB626, serves on the Health and Human Services Committee and voted to advance the bill out of committee, and then voted to advance the bill on the first round of debate.

The NRL Political Action Committee has a long history of educating voters by compiling candidate responses to a survey that are then published in NRL Voter Guides. Noted on the guides are candidates endorsed by NRL PAC. Approximately 75,000 printed guides are distributed statewide and also are made available via social media. Endorsements are made on the basis of candidates' survey answers, coupled in some cases with follow-up interviews with NRL Board members. Sen. Riepe was not interviewed given his record of voting in support of two pro-life bills from previous legislative sessions.

**Betrayal of one causes future deaths of many by killing Nebraska Heartbeat Act**

Several days before LB626 came to the floor for the first debate by the full Legislature (April 27), and without speaking to other pro-life senators about concerns he had with his own co-sponsored bill, Sen. Riepe proposed an amendment to LB626 that would lengthen the time that abortions could be performed to 12 weeks instead of the bill's original ban once a heartbeat could be detected (approximately six weeks). He justified this move by saying he only wanted "a discussion," and at that time, publicly stated in multiple settings that he would still support the Heartbeat Act even if his amendment did not pass. His "present, not voting" to end the filibuster that was mounted by opponents killed the bill that, if passed, would have saved approximately 1,700 future Nebraska citizens annually.

Had Nebraska Right to Life known Sen. Riepe would not live up to his promises made publicly and privately, he would not have received an endorsement. While he ultimately voted for passage of Amendment 1658, the 12-week protection, his action compromises the integrity of our long-standing and endorsement process that pro-lifers have relied upon for decades when making voting decisions. Now that he has aligned himself with the "reproductive freedom" ideology, he no longer qualifies for NRL's political support; therefore, Nebraska Right to Life Political Action Committee formally rescinds its endorsement of Sen. Riepe.



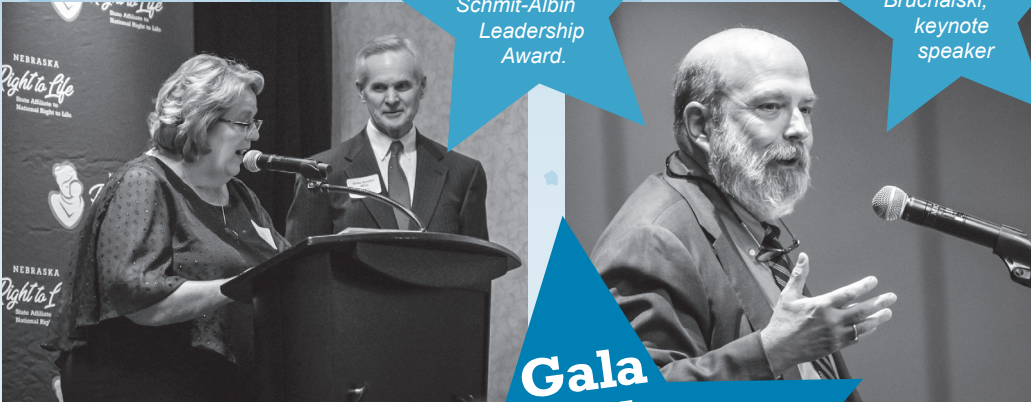
Panelists discuss Life issues during the event.



Mike  
Foley  
receives the Julie  
Schmit-Albin  
Leadership  
Award.

Dr.  
John  
Bruchalski,  
keynote  
speaker

Larry  
and  
Connie Consbruck of  
Hastings receive  
the Light for  
Life Award.



## Gala and Walk for Life 2024

Jan. 26 & 27

Fr.  
Tim  
Danek,  
master of  
ceremonies



## Volunteer Spotlight

### Amy Lenhoff brings her own skill set to NRL

After the passing of long-time NRL Executive Director Julie Schmit-Albin in August 2020, Sandy Danek, President of the NRL Board, was tasked with temporarily (and later, permanently) running the organization.

"To say this was overwhelming would be an understatement," Danek recalls. "I was surrounded by boxes in the office that NRL had recently moved into, and I didn't know where to begin." She put out word that she needed volunteers. Amy Lenhoff was one of those who answered the call.

"As a stay-at-home mom raising five kids, I didn't have much experience in office work, so I wasn't sure how much I could help," Amy said. "I always had known abortion was wrong, but I didn't know what I could do. This was my chance to contribute to the pro-life effort."

Amy quickly found ways to make herself indispensable. She became NRL's very own Martha Stewart, putting her homemaking and designing skills to work. She helped organize, clean and decorate the office, arranged flowers and helped deliver them to state senators, participated in voter guide literature drops, supervised the NRL display booth at functions, wrapped countless baby models, hand-addressed cards and letters, and helped plan and worked at events such as the annual Nebraska Walk for Life and Gala for Life.

"I love helping Sandy by doing non-office things so she can be freed up to do executive things," Amy said.

This year, Amy is even chairing the June 24 Life Fest celebrating the first anniversary of the Roe v Wade reversal. She accompanied Sandy to the 2022 National Right to Life Convention, which allowed her to be present when the reversal was announced in the convention hall.

"How historic it was to be there and watch the excitement and pure joy on the faces of those who had worked so long and hard for that reversal," she said. "I love being a part of something way bigger than me."

She treasures the friendships she has developed with Sandy and other volunteers; and now when people ask her to do something on the day she works at NRL, she simply replies, "Sorry, I have therapy that day!"

Amy knows what it is like to be pregnant and feel helpless. She shares her story because she wants others to know they do not need to feel that way.

On her 16th birthday, she was the victim of a sexual assault that resulted in pregnancy. She was not supported in her decision to carry the baby to term and place him for adoption, but she was determined to choose life for her child. Decades later, Jeffrey, now in his 40s, contacted the adoption agency in an effort to find his birth mother. The agency contacted Amy to ask if she wanted to pursue this, and when she said yes, the agency facilitated several months of letter exchanges, after which the agency revealed their identities to one another.

"The process caused a lot of pain as I relived the bad memories of the sexual assault and lack of support, but it was always in my heart to meet him someday," Amy said.

Amy's family has embraced Jeffrey, and God has rewarded her for choosing life so long ago.



Volunteer Amy Lenhoff helps with the literature drop of NRL Voter Guides.

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nebraskarighttolife.org



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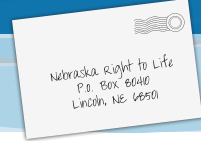
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## Mailing address

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Mail can only be received at our P.O. box.



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## Memorials

Jeff Danek from Jim & Mary Love

Emilie Valquartsen from Emilie's children:

Barbara Kruger, Dale Volquartsen and

Patrick Volquartsen

Friends of Tom Selzle III

# WANTED!

The 2023 Nebraska State Fair occurs Aug. 24 through Sept. 4, and Nebraska Right to Life needs volunteers to oversee our booth.

Please sign up at the link below to lend a hand!

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0D4AA8A92AABF8C70-state>



# LIFE FEST

## A POST-ROE CELEBRATION

Saturday, June 24, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.  
at Antelope Park in Lincoln

One year after the reversal  
of Roe v. Wade, let's celebrate life!



To volunteer, please sign up at this link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0D4AA8A92AABF8C70-june>



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